

## **Togo (Tier 2)**

The Government of Togo does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. Despite the documented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the government's anti-trafficking capacity, the government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared to the previous reporting period; therefore Togo remained on Tier 2. Togolese authorities investigated more suspected trafficking cases than in previous years, intercepted 250 potential child victims, and conducted increased outreach on child protection through community-based child protection entities. Additionally, officials instituted new programs to protect vulnerable populations. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Authorities convicted no traffickers, identified fewer victims, and failed to update the government's national action plan for the 13th consecutive year. Furthermore, the government did not finalize its pending decree to create a national anti-trafficking committee, despite the support of law enforcement and judicial officials, as well as civil society organizations.

### **PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Council of Ministers finalize and adopt the pending decree to create a Trafficking in Persons Inter-ministerial Committee to improve governmental coordination. • While maintaining the current stringent penalties Togo's law calls for, allow courts outside of the Assize Court system to hear trafficking cases to expedite adjudication of pending and future cases. • Update existing victim referral manuals to include victim identification SOPs, and train law enforcement, justice sector personnel, and federated bodies on those procedures to increase the number of victims identified and referred to protective services. • Provide training and institutional support to law enforcement and judicial officials to increase their ability to effectively prosecute trafficking cases; disseminate trafficking indicator documents to all police stations. • Designate focal points within the Ministry of Interior and Gendarmerie to coordinate and lead anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts. • Enact anti-trafficking legislation that includes provisions for victim protection and implement measures that incentivize victims to participate in the law enforcement and judicial process, including witness protection as well as the

provision of shelter, medical care, and psychosocial services. • Work with NGOs and international organizations to increase the accessibility to shelter and provision of protective services to all trafficking victims. • Draft, resource, and implement an updated national action plan that incorporates adult victims and increases coordination with NGOs, neighboring countries, and regional organizations. • Organize awareness-raising campaigns in concert with civil society to increase the population's ability to identify and report trafficking crimes, focusing on high-risk areas such as markets and other sectors with high numbers of individuals vulnerable to exploitation. • Develop a data collection and information management system to organize law enforcement and victim referral data, in collaboration with NGOs and international organizations. • Increase efforts to distribute birth certificates and national identity documents to citizens to reduce their vulnerability to trafficking. • Given concerns the Cuban government forces its citizens to work abroad in medical missions, Screen Cuban medical workers for trafficking indicators and refer them to appropriate services, if exploitative conditions are determined to exist.

## **PROSECUTION**

The government maintained law enforcement efforts. Articles 317 through 320 of the penal code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of 10 to 20 years' imprisonment and fines between 10 million and 50 million West African CFA francs (FCFA) (\$18,900 and \$94,520) for offenses involving an adult victim, and 20 to 30 years' imprisonment and fines between 20 million and 50 million FCFA (\$37,810 and \$94,520) for offenses involving a child victim. These penalties were sufficiently stringent, and with regard to sex trafficking, commensurate with penalties prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape.

The Ministry of Justice's anti-trafficking cell reported investigating 63 cases involving 79 suspects (64 male suspects and 15 female suspects) in 2020 compared with investigating 60 cases with 95 suspected traffickers in 2019. Officials reported prosecuting 51 suspects (42 men and 9 women) in 2020 versus 54 in 2019. During the reporting period, authorities did not convict traffickers compared with convicting three during the previous reporting period. However, the Assize Courts in Lomé and Kara responsible for hearing all trafficking cases were not operational during the entirety of the reporting period due to pandemic-related impacts on government operations. Observers noted the Assize Courts have been hindered in the past by inefficient operations exacerbated by a substantial backlog

of cases resulting in some victims waiting years for their cases to be adjudicated. The government did not report investigating, prosecuting, or convicting any officials complicit in human trafficking offenses, although judicial corruption may have hindered some trafficking investigations during the reporting period. In past years, officials reported adjudicating some forced child labor cases through informal mediation processes.

The government continued to provide written instructions on victim identification to its law enforcement and immigration officials through the course of their basic training. In 2020, authorities partnered with an international organization to provide anti-trafficking “training of trainers” to 25 individuals including media professionals, judges, civil society actors, judicial police, and parliamentarians. In the previous reporting period, the government trained 10 officers out of a 30-person urban law enforcement unit. Observers stated in past years, frequent turnover hindered the development of some law enforcement units’ institutional knowledge. Officials did not report utilizing the country’s 2019 tripartite agreement with Benin and Burkina Faso to synchronize law enforcement efforts on transnational trafficking cases during the reporting period, although the pandemic hindered effective implementation.

## **PROTECTION**

The government decreased overall efforts to identify victims. In 2020, Ministry of Justice, Directorate-General for Child Protection (DGCP), and other officials reported the government identified a total of 132 child victims of trafficking (52 boys and 80 girls) and 43 adult victims (30 men and 13 women), compared with 225 child victims (19 boys and 206 girls) and 87 adult victims (38 men and 49 women) in 2019. Both government officials and NGOs reported pandemic regulations restricting movement as a potential factor in the reduced number of trafficking victims identified. Of the 132 child victims noted above, the government assisted 48 with psychological and health services, food, and clothing, as well as referred them to shelters; officials disclosed they provided similar services to 147 child victims in 2019. Additionally, the DGCP reported officers intercepted 250 vulnerable minors at Togo's borders destined for Nigeria, Gabon, Benin, and Burkina Faso, and they returned the children to their families in Togo; officials did not report implementing similar measures in 2019. For the second consecutive year, the government allocated 18 million FCFA (\$34,030) to child trafficking efforts, of which it designated 11 million FCFA (\$20,790) for victim

care. The government additionally committed to providing 600,000 FCFA (\$1,130) to each of the six NGO shelters that it supports as it did in 2019, although the government reported these payments were delayed in 2020 due to lack of funds. In 2020, the government formed a 5,000-person taskforce to enforce the country's state of emergency due to the pandemic; the participation of officials with anti-trafficking responsibilities affected the government's ability to implement protection efforts.

Officials used written manuals from 2007 to identify and refer victims to services in coordination with NGOs; however, the manuals did not include SOPs for identifying victims among high-risk populations such as women in commercial sex. NGOs reported the government's victim identification and referral processes were effective and the ministries of Social Affairs, Labor, and Justice were key partners on prevention, protection, and investigation efforts respectively.

In Lomé, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MSA) continued to run a toll-free helpline, Allo 10-11, 16 hours per day, seven days a week; officials reported identifying 13 child victims from hotline tips during the reporting period, compared with 97 child trafficking victims during the previous reporting period. The MSA provided cell phones to Allo 10-11's network of 150 contacts to facilitate nationwide coverage and utilized an informal referral system when callers identified potential victims. The government did not report repatriating any victims for the second consecutive year.

While the government had a shelter for children, there were no such shelters specifically for adult trafficking victims, severely limiting their access to care and justice. Instead, the government referred adult trafficking victims to a center intended for victims of natural and humanitarian disasters. MSA continued to operate the Reference Center for the Guidance and Care of Children in a Difficult Situation (French acronym CROPESDI). The CROPESDI shelter, located in Lomé, received victims referred by the Allo 10-11 hotline and provided shelter, legal, medical, and social services before transferring them to care facilities managed by NGOs. The government reported that the CROPESDI shelter served 48 child trafficking victims during the reporting period. Officials did not report the number of victims other shelters served during the reporting period. Observers reported the lack of shelter options for adult victims adversely impacted efforts to investigate potential cases; in some cases, officers reported using their own resources for shelter and basic necessities for adult victims, which disincentivized some police from pursuing viable cases. The government reportedly provides foreign trafficking victims the same access to shelters as domestic victims and

performs a risk evaluation before it repatriates potential victims. The government reported providing shelter services to 12 Sierra Leonian trafficking victims during the reporting period who were in transit to Dubai.

The government did not have a formal process to encourage victims' participation in the investigation and prosecution of their traffickers and did not report providing services to adult victims who testified during court proceedings. While there were no reports the government penalized any trafficking victims for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit, there is a risk authorities may have detained or deported some victims due to the lack of victim identification SOPs and some officials' limited understanding of the crime.

## **PREVENTION**

The government increased overall efforts to prevent trafficking in persons; however, the government's deficient overall coordination continued to hinder its anti-trafficking efforts. The government managed its anti-child trafficking efforts and dissemination of information through the National Committee for the Reception and Social Reintegration of Child Victims of Trafficking (French acronym CNARSEVT), though the Committee reported it could not meet during the reporting period due to the pandemic. CNARSEVT acted as the government's central hub of information for trafficking in Togo; however, data collection and reporting remained weak during the reporting period. An NGO reported CNARSEVT faced operational challenges due to its lack of financial resources. The government failed to finalize a decree initially drafted in 2018 to create a Trafficking in Persons National Committee—a key recommendation of NGOs and working level officials to mitigate Togo's coordination challenges—and has not updated its anti-trafficking national action plan since 2008. In 2020, officials finalized Togo's five-year national action plan on child labor, which partially addressed issues of exploitation; this was separate from an overarching anti-trafficking national action plan. CNARSEVT reported the government launched an awareness raising campaign on the new national action plan on child labor and a decree that stated publicly hazardous work was forbidden for children. The government allocated 7 million FCFA (\$13,230) for the second consecutive year to continue a nationwide awareness campaign against trafficking in persons. The campaign targeted urban and rural areas, used radio interviews, and featured signage in schools, public buildings, and traditional chiefs' halls. Officials estimated the initiative reached approximately 15,000 citizens during the reporting

period; the government reported the campaign reached approximately 30,000 Togolese over the course of the previous reporting period. Pandemic-related restrictions on in-person gatherings limited some aspects of the government's awareness raising program. Organizers included French, Kabiyé, and Ewe languages in the campaign, which involved parents, community-based organizations, government officials, and religious leaders. Officials broadcast additional programming during the reporting period via community radio stations in Atakpame, Kara, and Dapaong, emphasizing the risks of exploitation. In response to children's increased vulnerability to exploitation due to pandemic-related school closures, the government trained 137 community leaders (including 31 women) to identify and report potential child trafficking cases in Lomé, as well as in the Plateaux, Kara, and Savanes Regions where many trafficking victims originate or transit.

Officials collaborated with the Governments of Benin and Ghana to sensitize communities along the Abidjan-Lagos corridor to enhance their awareness of trafficking. Unlike in past years, the government did not employ a network of "vigilance committees" to provide education on trafficking and report cases to the government. In 2020, officials established 84 community-based child protection entities known as "federated bodies" in Lomé, Kara, Savanes, Plateaux, and Maritime Regions to replace the "vigilance committees." The new entities held community dialogues to raise broad child abuse issues—including child trafficking—as well as develop and implement programming such as awareness raising, counseling, and reporting.

Despite past allegations of fraudulent recruiters facilitating the exploitation of Togolese abroad, authorities did not report investigating any foreign labor recruiters for trafficking crimes. The ministries of Labor and Social Action regulated labor recruitment firms, but the government's weak information management systems hindered its ability to provide enforcement statistics. The government worked to reduce the demand for forced child labor by continuing to partner with traditional religious leaders to eliminate exploitation in religious "apprenticeships." These "apprenticeships" involved parents entrusting their children to religious leaders for education and employment purposes; the religious leaders exploit the children in forced domestic work or sexual slavery when parents were unable to pay "apprenticeship fees." The government distributed an unknown number of birth certificates in coordination with NGOs; the lack of identification documents contributed to an increased vulnerability to trafficking in persons.

The government did not take any discernible measures to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts. Officials provided anti-trafficking training to Togolese troops prior to their deployment abroad on international peacekeeping missions. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided its diplomats with a guide to hiring domestic workers but did not report delivering trafficking-specific training.

## **TRAFFICKING PROFILE**

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Togo, and traffickers exploit victims from Togo abroad. While travel restrictions intended to slow the spread of the pandemic may have decreased transnational human trafficking, restrictions such as curfews imposed on the population—and the resulting deleterious economic impacts on livelihoods for individuals in the service and retail sectors—likely increased the vulnerability of many Togolese to exploitation during the reporting period.

In past years, the western border of the Plateau region, which provides easy access to major roads between Lomé and Accra, Ghana, served as a primary area used by traffickers to transport victims. NGOs noted the Abidjan-Lagos corridor remains a prominent route for cross-border trafficking of persons—as well as the smuggling of illicit goods—with criminals using Togo as a transit country. Civil society actors and law enforcement officers reported that the country’s rise as a regional economic and logistics hub has led to a corresponding increase in trafficking and smuggling. Families and trusted intermediaries take advantage of high levels of poverty throughout the country to exploit many Togolese trafficking victims, with the Centrale and Savanes regions serving as primary source regions. Traffickers force Togolese children to work in the agricultural sector—particularly on coffee, cocoa, and cotton farms—as well as in stone and sand quarries, where children and adults break rocks by hand. Observers stated trafficking networks are predominantly community-based and loosely organized by local actors, while syndicates with ties to the Middle East are more organized.

NGOs and government officials reported that markets selling Togolese children for commercial sex acts (“small girls markets” or *devissime*) exist in Lomé and elsewhere in the country. Traffickers visit rural areas in the north and central regions to recruit children from impoverished parents to sell in these markets. These illicit recruiters promise lucrative employment for the children and pay parents an advance before transporting the minors to Lomé, where traffickers subject the children to forced labor as domestic servants, roadside vendors, and

porters or exploit them in child sex trafficking. Togolese businesspeople exploit boys through forced labor in construction, salvage yards, mines, and as mechanics, often involving hazardous machinery.

Transnationally, fraudulent recruiters work with loosely affiliated networks to transport victims to Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Nigeria by land and to Gabon via ship. Traffickers force victims to work in the following sectors: cocoa harvesting in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire; palm wine production in rural Nigeria; gold mining in Burkina Faso; domestic service in urban Nigeria; and sex trafficking in Beninese and Nigerian bars and restaurants. Traffickers recruit children from Benin and Ghana and transport them to Togo for forced labor. Illicit networks exploit Ghanaian girls in sex trafficking in Togo. From September to April in past years, many Togolese adults and children migrated in search of economic opportunities to Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, where criminal elements may exploit them in forced labor and sex trafficking. Nigerians force Togolese men to labor in agriculture and Togolese women in domestic service in Nigeria. Some fraudulent labor agencies recruit Togolese and West African women for employment in Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, where wealthy families exploit them in domestic servitude or sex trafficking. Officials noted sex tourists from Lebanon, France, and Nigeria have exploited children in Togo during previous years, although pandemic-related travel restrictions likely minimized these risks for most of the reporting period. Cuban nationals working in Togo on medical missions may have been forced to work by the Cuban government.